

GAMES

PREVIEW

Grand Theft Auto IV



The biggest release of the year has arrived. Unfortunately, it's not available for the PC. Grand Theft Auto IV came out on 29th April for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 only. Although this is disappointing, we can take heart in the fact that each of the game's predecessors eventually got a PC release.

You play as Niko Bellic, an Eastern European immigrant, who has just arrived in America to seek his fortune. The game plays out in Liberty City, which resembles New York in all but name. Graphically the game has taken a huge leap forward: characters are highly detailed and environments are stunning.

In addition to a huge storyline, there's multiplayer carnage on offer for up to 16 players simultaneously. Games such as Cops and Robbers, where one team chases the other, should create hilarious and unforeseen consequences. We'll be waiving our usual PC-only stance to bring you a full review of the Xbox 360 version next month.

Seth Barton

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UBISOFT

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT

From www.play.com

When Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas appeared a little over a year ago, it revolutionised the tactical shooter genre with its mix of first and third-person covert-ops action. However, while this sequel is every bit as enjoyable, it's rather too similar for our liking.

Once again you're cast as the leader of a spec-ops team sent to Las Vegas to thwart a terrorist attack. You and your two AI-controlled sidekicks must use stealth to navigate indoor and outdoor levels – set in exotic locales including Sin City itself and a frozen mountain range – using the latest anti-terrorist weaponry and gadgets to wipe out your enemies.

Unlike many other shooters, Vegas 2 concentrates on stealth rather than gung-ho action. Your character can absorb only limited amounts of damage and, as checkpoints prevent you from saving at will, you must approach each room with the utmost caution.

You can make your soldier take cover by pressing him against walls and obstacles, at which point the first-person action switches to a third-person perspective, allowing you to lean out and shoot at enemies without exposing too much of yourself to their attacks. You also have an array of gadgets and hi-tech aids at your disposal, including snake cameras (for looking under doors) and satellite coverage of the surrounding area.

Issuing commands to your two AI sidekicks is easy thanks to a context-sensitive point-and-click order interface. However, your team-mates' borderline indestructibility does slightly diminish the game's otherwise sky-high tension levels.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Tense and tactical
- ✓ Superb online modes
- ✗ Too similar to the original

TACTICAL SHOOTER Requires Windows XP/Vista, 3GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), 128MB graphics card, 7GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000ZX55KM
DETAILS www.rainbowsixgame.com



▲ Use stealth and cunning to thwart terrorist attacks in Las Vegas in the latest Rainbow Six game

Enemy AI has been polished since the first Vegas, and it's now far rarer that enemies fail to see you when you're standing directly in front of them. Some farcical moments remain, though, most notably when your team-mates and enemies fight at close range, resulting in some comical Benny Hill-style capers.

While Vegas 2's online play is superbly tense and tactical, there's little to distinguish it from the original's. Highlights include co-op, in which you and a group of friends take on the single-player campaign, and a new mode called Team Leader, in which two teams race to get their leader to an extraction point while attempting to take out the opposition.

Given the striking similarities to its predecessor, and the fact that the graphics aren't a patch on Call of Duty 4 or Crysis, Vegas 2 isn't worth buying if you already own the original. While the plot is extended and in many ways tied up in this sequel, it's unlikely to satisfy you if you're looking for the next step in the Rainbow Six series. However, Vegas 2's tactical shooting action is still the best on the market, meaning both newcomers and die-hard fans will find it highly enjoyable.

Martin Korda

Top 5 games

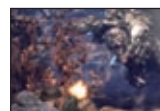
1. Gears of War

£18 inc VAT ★★★★★



In this third-person shooter you must think to survive. It's full of amazing action sequences and makes a great change from the usual first-person fare.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.gearsofwar.com FULL REVIEW Jun 2008



2. The Orange Box

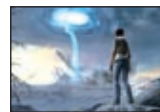
£22 inc VAT ★★★★★



This bargain omnibus contains the excellent Half-Life 2 plus Episodes 1 and 2.

There's also a mind-bending puzzle game, Portal, and the stylish Team Fortress 2.

SUPPLIER www.365games.co.uk DETAILS www.valvesoftware.com FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



3. Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

£30 inc VAT ★★★★★



This first-person shooter's short campaign mode is action-packed, while the multiplayer mode grabs your attention with unlockable weapons and skills.

SUPPLIER www.play.com DETAILS www.charlieoscardelta.com FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



4. Crysis

£19 inc VAT ★★★★★

Crysis gives you plenty of choice in how to approach your enemy and how to defeat them. However, its stunning graphics will leave all but the most powerful PCs struggling.

SUPPLIER www.727game.com DETAILS www.ea.com/crysis FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



5. Lord of the Rings: Shadows of Angmar

£10 + £9 a month inc VAT ★★★★★



This online role-playing game lets you immerse yourself in Tolkien's Middle Earth.

The game's detail is truly stunning, it's easy to get into and the combat is excellent.

SUPPLIER www.asda-entertainment.co.uk DETAILS www.lotro.com FULL REVIEW Sep 2007



VALVE Audiosurf

★★★★★

\$10 (about £6, online purchase only)
From www.steam.com

Audiosurf turns your music collection into levels in a racing puzzle game. Point it at almost any music file and it'll quickly generate a unique racetrack based on it. Don't look for identical beat-matching, though – instead, the tracks undulate with the speed of the song and grow more frenetic and colourful during the most intense sections of the music. Audiosurf's greatest achievement is that it seems to reflect the way music

makes a passionate listener feel as much as it does the structure of a song.

Its weakest element is the block-collection game that takes place on the music-generated track. Your goal is to stack related colours and avoid others to win points. Audiosurf then uploads your tally to a global scoreboard – so if anyone else has used that song, you'll see how your score compares. This is great when you're warring over a specific track with a friend or two,

each desperate to snatch the number one spot.

Audiosurf is best seen as a new way to enjoy your music than simply a puzzle game. Several modes are on offer, which involve collecting a single colour, for example, or having the ability to push errant blocks across the screen. After a little experimentation

SUMMARY

- ✓ Beautiful and unique
- ✓ Works with most file formats
- ✗ Puzzle element a little bland

PUZZLE GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 32MB graphics card, 400MB disk space. Compatible with CD, MP3, WMA, OGG, FLAC and iTunes files
DETAILS www.audio-surf.com



▲ Enjoy your music collection in a new and innovative way with Audiosurf

you'll find the one that suits you best and hits the right balance between a response to the music and a challenging game.

As a game for people who love block puzzles, Audiosurf isn't hugely impressive, but for those who love music and crave a new way to interact with it, it's an absolute must.

Alec Meer

EA Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath

★★★★★

£15 inc VAT
From www.amazon.co.uk

Last year's Command & Conquer (C&C) 3 saw the venerable series return to its original explosive action, but it wasn't an overly tactical game. Its first expansion pack tries to fix that by introducing a slew of new playable specialist sides. They're variations on existing themes, but they mean that multiplayer bouts of C&C 3 aren't the mindless carnage they sometimes were.

This is good news for online competitors, but lone players will be more interested in the solo campaign. Its extensive cut-scenes focus entirely on C&C's pantomime baddies – The Brotherhood of Nod. They promise answers to age-old cliffhangers in the series' storyline, but never really deliver them. Logic is thrown to the winds, as is the C&C way, but a lack of flair and humour this time makes for something that's unintelligible to new players and unsatisfying to old hands. The missions themselves have nothing

to offer anyone who's played a mainstream RTS before; they're simply there to slog through to unlock the cut-scenes.

Your attention is best directed to the new global conquest mode. Rather than a fixed sequence of missions, this open-ended turn-based mode sees you snatching Earth by increments. If an enemy occupies a patch of land you're trying to grab, you zoom into a

SUMMARY

- ✓ New mode is rewarding
- ✗ Cut-scenes are below par
- ✗ Tedious single-player game

REAL-TIME STRATEGY Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 64MB graphics card, 2.5GB disk space, Original Command & Conquer 3 game
PRODUCT CODE B00111NFOU
DETAILS www.commandandconquer.com



▲ This C&C expansion pack has a rewarding new game mode that encourages world domination

standard C&C 3 battle. It's not a new idea: it's borrowed from, most notably, the Total War games, but it's treated with more panache than might be expected. Crucially, it feels like its own game and not just a token system to string together a series of cookie-cutter battles.

The global conquest mode is all that saves Kane's Wrath from being a fans-only affair. The rest of the expansion pack is too impenetrable for anyone not reared on 15 years of C&C.

Alec Meer

VUZIX VR920

★★★

£250 inc VAT
From www.firebox.com

Virtual Reality (VR) headsets have been around since the 1980s, but have never really caught on. Vuzix's VR920 is the latest attempt to create an affordable headset display for PC gamers. Vuzix has a background in developing headsets for military applications, which quelled some of our usual cynicism about such devices.

The VR920's 640x480 native resolution is good for a

headset, but pitiful compared with even a 17in LCD monitor. Both 3D graphics and the Windows desktop had visible lines between the individual pixels. It might be easier to ignore this and get into the game if the headset were more comfortable, but it tends to slip down your face, making it difficult to focus on the screens. It comes with a head strap, but this isn't secure enough to hold it firmly in position.

Vuzix has produced 3D stereoscopic drivers for a reasonable selection of games, including Call of Duty 4, Half-Life 2 and Microsoft Flight Simulator X. Sensors can change the in-game view in response to head movements, but very few titles support this, and not all of those support the 3D mode as well. There's a full list of compatible titles on Vuzix's website.



The stereoscopic effect is a nice touch; each screen displays a slightly different image to fool the brain into perceiving depth. Although it's not always noticeable, it creates a strong sensation of depth in the right circumstances – such as when circling a large object in the foreground.

Despite some intriguing innovations and a reasonable price, the VR920 isn't much fun to use. We'd like to see the same technology in a better-fitting headset; a goggle-style design would work better. Technically it's a step in the right direction, but comfort and resolution issues mean we can't recommend this headset.

Kat Orphanides